

Second-place Winning Essay
2006 First Amendment Essay Contest

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As citizens of the United States, we are guaranteed rights that protect us from government influence and allow us to think for ourselves. Perhaps the most important rights we have are listed in the First Amendment of the Constitution. In this amendment, we are given five very important freedoms — the freedoms of speech, press, religion, assembly and petition. These freedoms alone help define America: a culturally rich, diverse country that is run by and for the people.

While the freedoms of speech and religion are the most recognized parts of the First Amendment (according to www.firstamendmentcenter.org), the freedom of press plays an important part in our everyday lives. Not only does it provide for most of the content in the newspapers we read every day, but it also allows us to express our opinions in writing. Through these opinions, we can criticize almost anything and not be punished for our thoughts.

Lately, the issue of school publications falling under the freedom of press has become a very controversial issue. Some people argue that students should be able to express opinions and cover sensitive issues without being censored by the school administration, while others think that harsh opinions and sensitive issues should be strongly censored in schools.

Set from the precedent of the Supreme Court case *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, many school administrators around the country are keeping a close eye on their student publications, scanning for scandalous or sensitive articles that could raise community concerns. By cutting or changing these articles, administrators aren't doing what they think they are. Instead of preventing community unease from the sensitive issues such as teen sexuality, they are preventing the students from learning about the issue. Many teens will think about sex during their high school career, so why not cover the issue? Why not raise teens' awareness of sex? There are simply no good answers.

Administrators should not censor out the sensitive issues in a student publication. If the topic is well researched, educational and well-intentioned, the student body will probably benefit from it. Some parents and community members will be mad, but there is nothing to lose. Students should be able to produce and read stories that will educate them on issues that they are sure to face in their lifetime. The First Amendment does not restrict these publications; neither should we.